



Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP
Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

20 September 2023

UK association to Horizon Europe and Copernicus

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for your letter dated 6 September 2023 regarding UK association to Horizon Europe and Copernicus. This was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 19 September 2023.

As you know the Committee has repeatedly argued that UK association to these programmes would be mutually beneficial for the UK and the EU. We therefore welcome the political agreement that has now been reached by the parties. As we noted in correspondence with the then Foreign Secretary in March 2022, UK association to Horizon Europe will have wider commercial, scientific and cultural benefits for both the UK and the EU, in addition to the direct funding opportunities that it provides for researchers.

We regret the length of time that it has taken to reach this point, following the agreement in principle that was reached alongside the TCA. Some of the detrimental consequences of the long period of uncertainty that have been experienced over the past two years, for instance researchers leaving the UK and UK-based researchers being excluded from bids for Horizon funding, will have longer-term implications even now that an agreement has been reached. In previous correspondence with both the Government and the European Commission we described the “politicisation of scientific research” as “highly unwelcome”. We stand by this view and believe that, in future, scientific collaboration should be considered on its own merits and should not again be linked to wider developments in the UK-EU relationship as was the case in the period before the agreement on the Windsor Framework was reached. We ask you to confirm that this is also the view of the Government.

We note that your letter contains only limited details about the terms of the political agreement that has been reached with the European Commission. We ask you to provide additional detail in reply to this letter, including in particular about the operation of the corrective mechanism designed to prevent the UK from paying a disproportionate net contribution to the scheme. We also ask you to update us on the expected timetable for the political agreement to be formally adopted by the Specialised Committee on Union Programmes.

The Annex to the TCA that was agreed in 2020 envisaged that, in addition to Horizon Europe and Copernicus, the UK would also associate to the Euratom research and training programme, as well as Fusion4Energy/ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor). We acknowledge your statement that the UK fusion sector has “communicated a preference for an alternative programme that would involve direct investment in the UK sector” and that a substantial package of domestic funding is planned. We also note that the European Commission’s website states that the decision not to pursue UK association was “guided by the UK’s assessment that its industry’s

long absence from Euratom and F4E/ITER programmes cannot be reversed". Nevertheless, we are concerned about the possible implications of this decision for collaboration between UK and EU researchers in these important areas. We therefore ask that in reply to this letter you provide some more detailed information about the Government's rationale for not pursuing association to these programmes. We also ask that you indicate whether there are any plans for ongoing cooperation with the EU in the nuclear field. Finally, we ask whether the UK would consider association to EU programmes in this area in future funding cycles.

We look forward to a response within the usual 10-working day deadline.

I am copying this letter to Leo Docherty MP, Minister for Europe; Sir William Cash MP and Jonathan Whiffing, respectively Chair and Acting Clerk of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee; Rt Hon Greg Clark MP and Dr Faten Hussein, respectively Chair and Clerk of the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee; and Baroness Brown of Cambridge and Matthew Manning, respectively Chair and Clerk of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the name 'Peter Ricketts' written in a cursive style.

Lord Ricketts

Chair of the European Affairs Committee